

# Power to the People of Color

African American and Latinx Representation in the U.S. Congress



Roos Schoute  
S4496523

Bachelor Thesis  
Radboud University  
American Studies  
June 16, 2019

Supervisor: dr. P.B van der Heiden  
Second reader: dr. M.G. Valenta

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: P.B. van der Heiden

Title of document: VdHeiden\_Schoute\_BAThesis

Name of course: BA Werkstuk Amerikanistiek

Date of submission: June 16, 2019

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Name of student: Roos Schoute

Student number: S4496523

## Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1 - African American Representation in Congress	8
1.1 Self-presentation of African American legislators	8
1.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the African American community	9
1.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of voters	11
1.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship	12
1.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections	14
Chapter 2 - Latinx Representation in Congress	16
2.1 Self-presentation of Latinx legislators	16
2.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the Latinx community	17
2.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of voters	19
2.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship	20
2.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections	22
Chapter 3 - Comparing the influence of descriptive representation on the African American and the Latinx community	24
3.1 Self-presentation of African American and Latinx legislators	24
3.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the African American and Latinx community	25
3.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process	27
3.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship	28
3.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections	30
Conclusion	32
References	34

## Abstract

Representation of minorities in American politics has grown over the years and diversity is larger than ever. Since the midterm elections in 2018, representation for the largest ethnic and racial minority groups, African Americans and Latinos, has especially increased. This research project analyzes the representation of African American and Latinx legislators in the United States Congress and its effect on the representatives' communities. It will be evaluated by looking at five different factors for both groups: self-representation of the legislators, political participation of voters, the decision-making process during elections, the relationship between voters and representatives, and representation in different types of elections. By means of a textual analysis the effects on both communities will be discussed. The differences and similarities between the African American and the Latinx community will be analyzed as well.

Keywords: descriptive representation, African American, Latinx, Congress, identity, legislator

## Introduction

Over the past years, the United States Congress has slowly become more diverse. Particularly the 2018 midterm elections led to an essential increase in diversity of the new Congress, as a large number of women, Latinxs, and African Americans were newly elected. This election led to several other noteworthy gains in diversity, such as the election of the first two Native American and Muslim women (Zweigenhaft, 2018). One of the newly elected Latinx Congress members is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who also happened to be the youngest woman ever elected to the U.S. Congress. In her campaign, she mainly focused on her Latin heritage and problems to which many Latin Americans could relate, such as immigration justice and the abolishment of ICE. Her choice of issues, her large presence on social media, and the fact that she focused on her heritage in her campaign are some of the factors that led to her being elected into Congress. As a result, she became one of the most popular politicians in the United States and her following, both online and offline, has grown only further (Alter, 2019).

Both Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's successful campaign and the significant increase of Latinx legislators have been important developments for minorities in American politics. Therefore, it has become an interesting topic for research. This thesis will look at self-presentation of African American and Latinx legislators and how this and the fact that descriptive representation, i.e. the number of representatives from these minority groups in Congress, is growing, affects voters in the African American and Latinx community.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its several amendments has led to more African American and Latinx representatives being elected into Congress, which increased representation of these groups increased significantly. Ethnic and racial groups are descriptively represented when they share characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and gender with their representative (Pantoja & Segura, 2003). There are currently several ongoing debates on the effect of descriptive representation and whether or not it has a positive effect on representation of minority groups. Previous research has mainly focused on African Americans but as the Latinx community is now the largest minority group in the U.S. it is becoming more important to study the effects on that group as well. Research on African American representation has exclusively focused on turnout in districts where the group is well represented. No studies have been conducted yet on turnout in such districts compared to districts where there is no descriptive representation, which means the effect of descriptive representation has not fully been tested (Griffin & Keane, 2006). "Who votes and who

doesn't has important consequences for who gets elected and for the content of public policies" (Lijphart, 1997, p. 4). As policies could be affected by who is elected, it is important to focus on how well minorities are represented in Congress. Previous research has focused on the effect of descriptive representation on minority groups but there is still mixed evidence, especially on the effect of African American representation on voter turnout of African Americans in elections. However, this does suggest that there are factors within the African American community that affect the varying turnout numbers (Griffin & Keane, 2006). Research on representation of the Latinx community has mainly focused on ideology and state legislatures, and it was found that ethnicity plays a role in the legislative process but it often varies depending on what the state and setting is. As for African Americans, this again suggests that there are differences within the community that cause these varying effects (Wallace, 2014).

The question that will be answered in this thesis is "To what extent does the effect of descriptive representation in Congress differ for the African American and Latinx community?". This will be done through looking at the effects of descriptive representation on the African American and the Latinx community, and comparing the results. The factors that this thesis will focus on are self-representation of legislators and to what extent they focus on their heritage, the effects of descriptive representation on political participation of both groups, the importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of constituents, the effects of descriptive representation on the relationship between the legislators and constituents, and the different effects in elections on several levels. To answer the research question, a text analysis will be conducted. I will start by focusing on the effects on the mentioned factors regarding the African American community and subsequently, I will specifically focus on the Latinx community. Lastly, the effects on both communities will be compared and a conclusion will be drawn.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on the effects of descriptive representation on the African American community and is divided into five sub questions. First, I will concentrate on how African American legislators represent themselves and how they communicate their message and identity to their voters. Secondly, I will describe how descriptive representation affects the political participation of constituents in the African American community. After this, the importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of African American voters will be analyzed. I will also focus on what factors other than race play a role in this process. Then, I will pay attention to the effects of descriptive representation on the relationship between African American legislators

and their constituents, and how and why this often changes. Lastly, I will compare the previously found information to look at the effects of descriptive representation in elections on different levels, such as local, congressional, and presidential elections. In the second chapter, the focus will be on descriptive representation of the Latinx community. The term 'Latinx' will be used rather than 'Latino' as this is a fairly new gender-neutral term that is deemed more inclusive than 'Latino' in the United States. I will use the same sub questions used in the first chapter to be able to compare the results in the third chapter. In the last chapter, the results that were found in the first and second chapter will be compared. The same sub questions used in chapter one and two will be used in the last chapter as well. Finally, I will give an overview of the results found in the chapters and I will draw a conclusion on the existing differences and similarities in effects for the African American and the Latinx community.

## Chapter 1: African American Representation in Congress

### 1.1 Self-presentation of African American legislators

To recruit supporters, it is important for all members of Congress to create a political community by focusing on identities that people share with each other. This creates a sense of 'groupness' through which people can identify with a group. In this process, the congress member must construct a collective identity by creating stories, memories, myths, and beliefs. The creation of this identity is often done through communication with help from the mass media as they are needed to spread their message, preferably in a way that it becomes entertaining for the public to consume (Louw, 2015).

Communication through the web has become a popular medium for politicians to bring their message across for their voters. Presidential candidates often announce their campaigns on the internet and news channels such as CNN rely on the same medium as it allows voters to actively participate in politics through, for example, submitting questions for primary debates. But not only presidential candidates have to present themselves to the outside world. Congress members rely on the internet as well, as congressional websites allow for accessible, quick, and fairly limitless amounts of information to be exchanged between representatives and their constituents. Nowadays, essentially every member of Congress has their own website and campaign website, which represent each of them in a unique way, as they choose which issues, legislation, and topics are relevant to their voters and will be presented (Gershon, 2008). Although some aspects of congressional websites are similar for all representatives, there are many differences in how members of Congress present themselves and their activities to their voters. This aspect is particularly important for women and minority members, as they can choose to emphasize their gender, racial, and ethnic background for their voters to identify with. Previous research has proven that whether or not representatives choose to focus on these aspects depends on their gender, race, and ethnicity. Generally, female representatives tend to focus more on issues relating to gender and issues such as healthcare and education, which are usually seen as “female” issues, whereas male representatives are more likely to emphasize “male” issues such as the economy and defense (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

Usually, minority representatives tend to focus more on their race and issues that are race-related than white representatives, especially in legislation, floor speeches, and communication with their voters. For African Americans, this means that they often focus on subjects such as civil rights. By focusing on racial issues, African American representatives

do not only want to create an identity that black voters can identify with, they also hope to expand the government's response to these sorts of issues. There is currently little attention for these issues, as African Americans and other minorities only make up a small part of Congress compared to their white counterparts. This is reflected in the amount of race-related issues that are on the agenda. It is also often the case that African Americans only focus on their race in their discussion of general issues, as these generally dominate the public agenda. However, studies on campaign ads have found that African Americans and white representatives running against each other focus equally on race related issues in their advertisements, which suggests that the context in which the issues are presented influences the representatives' choice to focus on race (Gershon, 2008).

The ways in which representatives present themselves do not only differ between the various races and ethnicities but also among them. Previous studies have suggested that this is the case as minority women are in a way "doubly disadvantaged". Generally, African American women focus as much on racial issues as their male counterparts in the bills that they introduce in the House of Representatives. However, there is a common stereotype that black women are tough and non-feminine, to which African American representatives often respond by focusing more on their feminine side, gender identity, and gender-related issues rather than focusing on their race. Another strategy African American women often choose is to combine their racial background and gender to be able to identify with a larger community. A strategic use of intersectionality creates an advantage for black female legislators as in some cases it will grant them a multiple identity advantage, which shows that minority women are perfectly able to represent the most marginalized communities (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

## 1.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the African American community

Minorities have been underrepresented in the past, and for most of them this is still the case. Because of these groups' lack of representation, it is particularly important for them to be represented by descriptive representatives; "individuals who in their own backgrounds mirror some of the more frequent experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the group" (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 628). In the case of African Americans, this means that they are represented by a legislator that shares their heritage and experiences. This is an important aspect as this means that the common experiences of the representatives and their

constituents are likely to increase the legislator's attachment and loyalty to the constituents' interests (Mansbridge, 1999).

African Americans have encountered many legal and economic difficulties in the past that prohibited them from participating in elections. As a result, there is a strong focus on researching the stimulation of African American voter turnout nowadays. Past studies have uncovered mixed results on whether or not the increase of African American representation in electoral districts has stimulated the African American voter turnout in elections. It has been proven that the increase of African American prominence in politics has an effect on turnout of white voters, as those turnout rates usually decrease. However, this demobilization of white voters does not always mean an equal increase in mobilization of black voters. It is therefore not always the case that the political involvement among African Americans expands when they are being represented in Congress (Gay, 2001). There are several reasons why, only occasionally, African American representation in Congress positively impacts the turnout of black voters. The most important reason is that minorities often prefer to be represented by someone of their own race, so if there is a choice between a white and a black candidate, they tend to choose the latter despite the fact that the candidates' positions on important issues may be identical (Washington, 2006). History plays a role in this as well, as African Americans were excluded from politics for ages. The fact that their representation has increased would empower them because they are finally able to participate in politics and make a change for their community. Furthermore, descriptive representation could also increase African Americans' interest and knowledge of politics, which encourages them to vote. The fact that they have gained representation in the first place may also give them more confidence and hope that their goals could be achieved through governmental action (Griffin & Keane, 2006).

It is not only important to look at the number of African Americans that participate in elections but also at who the voters are within that group, as this has significant consequences for who gets elected and what the essence of public policies will be. As mentioned before, it is difficult to determine whether or not black representation increases black voter turnout, which is mainly the case because the group of African Americans in the United States is not homogeneous. Therefore, the growing descriptive representation has different effects on each subgroup within the African American community, which explains why studies have found varying results on whether or not the increasing representation positively affects voter turnout. It has been proven that people in the United States are more likely to vote when they know that their interests are represented well enough to be worth supporting. An important

indicator that people often use to predict whether or not they should support candidates is race. In most cases, white candidates represent more conservative interests than black candidates (Griffin & Keane, 2006).

The difference in voting behavior that is mentioned before exists between liberal African Americans and those who are more conservative. Liberal African Americans are generally more likely to feel alienated when they are not represented, as white representatives are expected to have less liberal views than people of color. Therefore, when African American representation increases, there will be more candidates with liberal viewpoints, which encourages liberal voters to participate in elections. In contrast, conservative African Americans will feel more alienated when the representation is expanded and are therefore less likely to vote. The fact that not all African Americans have the same voting behavior shows that descriptive representation cannot have a homogenous effect on the entire population group. This also explains why there have been conflicting results on the effect of representation on African American voter turnout, as this means that the connection between the two can vary depending on the scale on which it has been researched (Griffin & Keane, 2006).

### 1.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of voters

To determine who to vote for in an election, voters constantly evaluate the candidates using three main factors: party, ideology, and candidate qualities. Essentially, voters are more likely to rate members of their own party higher than someone from the opposite party. However, in United States legislative politics it is possible that a representative's ideology does not match the ideology of their party. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the party of a candidate, and focus more on their personal ideology instead. Another important factor is a candidate's competency, which is established through bill sponsorship, seniority, party chairmanships, and staff. Not many bills actually become policy or law, which is why voters prefer looking at policy activism, if a candidate's goals are expressed in a way that they deem tangible and achievable, and if the candidates actually have a record of achieving their goals in the past. Constituents often focus on seniority as well, as this is an indicator of their influence in Congress. Candidates' effectiveness and quality are generally measured by the amount of leadership positions they have had in their career and in how many committees they have served. Although all members of the House of Representatives have the same staff

allowances, the amount of staff a representative has employed is used as an indicator of their service. Most casework is difficult and time consuming, so if a legislator has many employees, they have more time for themselves to focus on their voters. The last factor that black voters use to determine who to vote for is the candidate's campaign activity, in which they mainly focus on expenditures and the margin of victory in previous elections, if applicable. If members of Congress are highly rated they will probably be the most effective campaigner in an election. Candidates who have won earlier elections by high margins are often well known and have a high rating, and are therefore likely to get many votes in the next election. Incumbents with high expenditures in previous campaigns are also well known, but are not always liked by voters (Tate, 2001).

Although most African American voters believe descriptive representation is important, heritage and identity are not the only factors they look at while choosing who to vote for in an election. It could be that this is the case because race is a fairly broad factor and it is difficult to capture its essence in its entirety. This is also one of the reasons that it is difficult to determine whether or not representatives that are from the same race as their constituents are always the best representation for that group, as it is possible they are chosen because of their identity while they score lower on factors such as efficiency or competency.

#### 1.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship

Political representation is an important aspect of politics, as it gives people of a community a voice and recognition to their ideas and goals. If groups are represented by someone of their own race, it is more likely that their voice will be heard as the interests of the congress members will presumably be similar to theirs (Tate, 2001). Descriptive representation of African Americans does not only affect the voter turnout of the community, as mentioned before, but also the way that voters relate to their representatives and their opinions about them (Bowen & Clark, 2014). Voters start forming an opinion on representatives at the beginning of an election. They use a "low information shortcut", in which they determine where the candidate stands on certain issues by analyzing data about factors such as their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, social background, qualifications, and party. Because it can be difficult to obtain such information, many voters tend to focus on symbolic and descriptive representation (Tate, 2001).

Previous studies have found that groups that are descriptively represented in Congress have a higher chance of knowing the name of their legislators, are more likely to appreciate

them and have a good reason for it, and, as mentioned before, are often more likely to vote for them. This means it can be concluded that being represented by a member of Congress who people can racially or ethnically identify with increases the relationship between the voter and the legislator. The relationship between voters and their representatives is a two-way process, which is influenced by the legislator's behavior and how this is perceived by the voter. Research suggests that, regardless of the congress member's behavior, voters will support them because of their race. However, there is a difference in how white voters and African American voters respond to descriptive representation, as white people are the majority and therefore more widely represented, which makes that they are often content with their representative's behavior. For African Americans, this is only the case if they are represented by someone of their own race. It has been proven that black representatives best represent people of their community regarding policy responsiveness, in which the representative tries to secure certain benefits for their constituents. The reason that the relationship and communication between legislators and voters is better when they are of the same race is mainly that they often have a similar view on the sociopolitical reality in the country, which makes it easier to effectively communicate with African American voters as these legislators know how to formulate the message and how it will be perceived. They will also have a better sense of what the target group of the message should be. African American voters have higher expectations from representatives of their own race and are more willing to learn important information about them, such as their party and background. This is different for white people, as they tend to assume their interests will always be served, regardless of a legislator's race. Therefore, descriptive representation is more likely to cause a change in the relationship between black representatives and their voters than between a white voter and a member of Congress (Bowen & Clark, 2014).

Because descriptive representation is of great value for African Americans in the United States, they tend to be more likely to trust representatives of their own race. This is mainly a result of the group's history, as continuing discrimination and racism in the country resulted in them developing a sense of linked fate, which is also the reason it is more difficult for white representatives to gain trust from minorities. Another motive for African Americans to support black representatives is that they do not only want to represent the people within a district but are also willing to go beyond that and represent the group as a whole (Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

## 1.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections

As previously described, descriptive representation matters for African American voters. However, this is a fairly general statement as I have not yet made a distinction in the influence of representation on various levels of American politics. Therefore, I will now analyze the influence of descriptive representation on voter participation in local, congressional, and presidential elections.

Most research has focused on the connection between increasing descriptive representation of African Americans and its influence on the voter turnout of that community in congressional elections, where it often leads to a demobilization of white voters but not always to mobilization of African Americans (Gay, 2001). As mentioned before, the most important reason for this is that there are large differences between conservatives and liberals within the African American community, which means the group as a whole would most likely not entirely agree with the ideology of a black representative in a district (Griffin & Keane, 2006). Whereas it has been difficult for researchers to determine whether or not descriptive representation has a direct positive influence on the voter turnout in congressional elections, the connection is more evident in local elections for council representation, although there is limited data available on this subject. The main reason that descriptive representation has a more pertinent effect in local elections is that candidates on a local level have a larger presence in their communities than representatives in Congress. This is because Congress members can only spend so much time in their district because they also have obligations in Washington, D.C. which they have to attend. Local officials have more time to interact with their communities face-to-face, which is likely to increase voter participation and therefore the influence of descriptive representation as well (Whitby, 2007).

In a study on the presidential election in 2008, the influence of descriptive representation in states on black voter turnout in that specific election was researched. In this election, the turnout among African Americans was the highest since they became eligible to participate in elections through the Voting Rights Act in 1965. One of the factors that caused this number to rise was the fact that Obama was a black candidate, but the most important aspect was that black voters were more frequently contacted about the campaign than before as they received more information about the candidates, on how to register, and the location of polling places, which increased the likelihood of them casting their vote. This increase in the spread of information about the election only appeared in states with a high percentage of black state legislators, as they often put more effort in contacting black voters because they

believe mobilization of African Americans is an important value for the community. The study shows that these efforts resulted in disengaged voters becoming more likely to vote in states with a high number of black legislators. However, it did not change the voting behavior of black voters that were already engaged, which means descriptive representation and being contacted by black officials does not influence black political behavior in general and only affects the attitude of voters who did not vote regularly in the past. Although this study only focused on one specific election, the results could be applied to other elections as well, as it is likely that voting becomes a habit and disengaged voters will develop into engaged voters in upcoming elections (Clark, 2014). Other studies have proven that after Barack Obama was elected, most African Americans experienced an increase in political efficiency due to descriptive representation, as other racial and ethnic minorities did not endure the same. These increased feelings of efficiency have proven to be an important aspect for the increase of political participation among African Americans as well (Merolla et al., 2012). Overall, descriptive representation has the most apparent effect in local elections. It also affects participation in congressional and presidential elections, but only to a certain extent.

## Chapter 2: Latinx Representation in Congress

### 2.1 Self-presentation of Latinx legislators

Since the midterm elections in November 2018, the U.S. Congress has a new record number of Latinx legislators, with forty-five Latin American members in the House of Representatives, and five in the Senate (Congressional Research Service, 2019). However, the share of Latinx legislators in Congress is still lower than the total share of the Latinx population in the United States, which means they are not yet sufficiently represented (Gamo, 2018). For those who are representing the Latinx community in Congress, it is important to focus on creating an image of themselves that their constituents can relate to and identify with, which is mostly done through creating stories, memories, myths, and beliefs (Louw, 2015).

To communicate this message to their constituents, representatives make extensive use of the internet. Especially congressional websites are used to spread large amounts of information to constituents in a quick and accessible manner. In this day and age, essentially every member of Congress has their own website which they use to communicate their identity, message, and issues they support (Gershon, 2008). There are many differences in how legislators communicate their agenda and identity with their constituents. All minority representatives have a choice of whether or not they want to emphasize their heritage, which leads to great differences in legislators' focus on issues, as this is often affected by the representative's heritage. Another difference that occurs among minority groups is between male and female legislators regarding which issues they deem important (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

As mentioned in the previous chapter on African American representation, women tend to focus more on gender-related issues and issues that are seen as "female", such as healthcare and education, whereas men often focus on the "male" issues, economy and defense. There is a similar difference among Latinx officials, as Latina representatives tend to focus on issues that affect the community in general, more than on women's issues only. Latina officials generally also put more emphasis on connectedness, collectivity, community, and consciousness than their male counterparts. Female legislators often focus on both their gender and heritage, more than male legislators, as this could provide them with a multiple identity advantage because it shows their constituents they are able to represent the most disadvantaged groups. Latino and Latina representatives pay similar attention to issues that are related to race, such as affirmative action, civil rights, and legislation, but women

generally discuss the issues that are specifically relevant for their gender. In discussing these issues, Latina representatives often use examples from their own lives to increase connectedness with their community. The fact that Latina legislators refer to their heritage, gender, and class on their congressional websites, portrays an identity that is complete, which often draws the attention of a broad audience (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

Although Latinx members of Congress focus more on issues related to gender and ethnicity than their white counterparts, the issues generally only compose a small part of the total amount of issues on a legislator's agenda. Therefore, many congress members try to incorporate gender and ethnicity into their discussion of general issues. This way, the issues pertinent to their community will gain more attention as general issues are more likely to be on top of the public and political agenda than those related to race or ethnicity. For example, while white representatives discuss veteran, healthcare, and business issues, Latinx legislators would relate these to their own community by talking about Latinx veterans, healthcare needs specific to Latinxs or challenges faced by Latinx business owners. Legislators often use their congressional websites, speeches, interviews, and press releases to draw attention to these issues. Research has proven that overall, about half of the Latinx representatives in Congress relate discuss race and ethnicity related issues in relation with general issues, whereas only ten percent of white representatives use general issues to do the same (Gershon, 2008).

## 2.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the Latinx community

After the addition of several amendments to the Voting Rights Act in 1982, the drawing of majority-minority districts, in which the majority of the total population consists of a racial or ethnic minority group, became a successful strategy to have minorities elected into legislative offices. Research has proven that the turnout of Latinx communities is higher in majority-minority districts than in other districts, as the communities are better represented there. One of the reasons that Latinx descriptive representation increases the voter turnout is that it empowers the community. In districts where there is a vast white majority, it is difficult for minorities to elect someone from their own community into office. After a while, it will become discouraging for minorities to see that their efforts have been in vain. When Latinx voters see that their votes matter and turning out to vote is rewarding, they are more likely to vote again and encourage others to vote as well. In addition, the fact that Latinxs have the opportunity to elect a candidate of their own choosing that is also from their own community,

has an empowering effect as well (Barreto et al., 2004). Another reason why descriptive representation often has a positive effect on the voter turnout of the Latinx community is that it makes it easier for voters to gather information about elections and it can increase their expectations on the influence of people from their own community in Congress (Rocha et al., 2010). The election of minority legislators in general often increase psychological engagement and interest in politics and elections among minority voters. These legislators also tend to value mobilization of ethnic communities more than white legislators and are therefore willing to devote more time and resources to this effort. Descriptive representation strengthens feelings of shared group consciousness and trust among the Latinx community as well. This is mainly based on four characteristics: Latin American heritage, the immigrant experience, the Spanish language, and Spanish colonial influence. Although not all Latinx voters feel this consciousness in the same way, it is often strong enough to bring the community together. The fact that Latinxs can positively identify with legislators that have the same ethnicity as them thus leads to greater empowerment of the Latinx community and therefore higher levels of voting and participation (Barreto, 2007).

A different approach to determine political engagement is measuring political alienation among the Latinx electorate. People who experience alienation from politics often have feelings of powerlessness, cynicism, meaninglessness, estrangement, and distrust. As a result, they tend to disconnect from political activities, including voting. Research has shown that mainly individuals from the working and lower-class encounter this problem. As mentioned before, an increase in descriptive representation of Latinx legislators usually leads to an increase in voter turnout of that community as well. In addition, descriptive representation also has a positive effect on Latinx political empowerment, which decreases the level of political alienation in the Latinx community as it provides them with a belief that their interests will be put on the political agenda instead of legislators exclusively focusing on more dominant interests. When constituents are represented by more than one representatives of their own ethnicity, the effect that reduces the feelings of political alienation among Latinxs increases as well. However, there are other demographic and political factors that influence alienation, such as age, political knowledge, and the state in which the constituent is residing. Political knowledge is the most influential factor in this, as descriptive representation has a greater effect on constituents that have greater political knowledge, which generally means they are better informed about descriptive representation (Pantoja & Segura, 2003).

### 2.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process of voters

During the process of choosing who to vote for in an election, voters evaluate all candidates in order to make a deliberate decision. While doing this, Latinx voters specifically consider qualities such as intelligence, leadership, and the factor “cares about people like you” (Manzano & Sanchez, 2010, p. 570). Generally, the factors voters focus on are more personal rather than political, as candidate quality is predominantly measured by a candidate’s level of competence, empathy, integrity, and leadership, which are personal traits. This also means that voters do not necessarily make a distinction between white and Latinx candidates as desirable qualities are often deemed more important. Although voters tend to concentrate more on candidates’ personal traits, their perceptions of political ability also play a role in the decision-making process. The reason that there is such a strong focus on personal attributes is that this information is easily accessible. Voters mostly base their choice on perceptions of experience and competence. Especially experience is important, as this is often the dominant factor in deciding a winner in open-seat races as it can give a challenger an advantage over the incumbent. Experience is also an important indicator as candidates establish name recognition, political organization, fundraising and campaigning skills through political experience (Manzano & Sanchez, 2010).

Although Latinx voters do not distinguish between Latinx and white candidates in the assessment of their qualities, there are several factors that stimulate greater support for Latinx candidates. For example, Latinx voters are more likely to vote for a candidate from their own community if they come across as strong and are competitive and qualified. They generally offer less support for Latinx candidates that are less-qualified, although those with a strong connection to their ethnic traits would vote for a Latinx candidate, even if they are less-qualified than their opponent. However, it is mainly the case that when all factors of the candidates are equal, ethnicity is the deciding element that convinces constituents to vote for the Latinx candidate. The support for Latinx candidates is the strongest among voters who are fluent in Spanish and experience the most discrimination from white people, as they deem ethnicity more important than qualifications and therefore feel more connected to Latinx representatives (Manzano & Sanchez, 2010).

The Latinx electorate is a heterogeneous group and consists of people of various races, which influences their socio-economic status and quality of life as a result of discrimination and marginalization, and could therefore also have an influence on their

political behavior, mainly their voter choice. Although candidate evaluations play a major role in the decision-making process, there are more factors that influence voters, such as socio-economic status, partisanship, incumbency, issues they support, and racial identification. Because race is one of the underlying factors that determines socio-economic status and the social position of voters in society, racial identification within the Latinx community is likely to influence the voter's decision to vote for a Latinx or non-Latinx candidate. Although it has been proven that, generally, Latinx voters rather vote for a candidate from their own community than for a candidate that is not from Latinx descent, this is not always true as the Latinx community consists of individuals from different backgrounds. For example, Latinxs who also identify as black often have a lower economic status than white Latinxs, which makes it logical to classify those Latinxs as black rather than Latinx, based on the differences in social reality between the groups. In addition, black Latinxs often lack an important part of the Latinx identity as they are less likely to be immigrants than Latinxs from other backgrounds. Instead, the source that is essential for the creation of the black Latin identity is intermarriage. As a result, Latinxs that identify as black are more likely to feel an attachment to the African American community. Voting for a Latinx candidate in an election would not provide those people the same benefits as for other Latinxs as they benefit more from legislation in favor of African Americans. Therefore, it is unlikely that they would cast a vote for a Latinx candidate in an election (Stokes-Brown, 2006).

#### 2.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship

The 116th Congress is the most ethnically and racially diverse in the history of the United States as 22% of the members are a racial or ethnic minority (Bialik, 2019). This is an important development for the Latinx community, as they particularly value descriptive representation because of their history of discrimination. Latinx constituents have developed a group consciousness as a result of this discrimination and it is therefore difficult for white representatives to earn the trust of Latinx constituents (Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

An increase in minority representation thus means better representation of minority interests as minority legislators are more likely to have similar concerns as their constituents. Apart from increasing voter turnout, a rise in descriptive representation also influences the relationship between representatives and their voters. Important factors that indicate developments in this relationship are legislative responsiveness, i.e. to what extent policy

outcomes are responsive to the preferences of voters, and the transmission of information between the voters and the members of Congress. In general, descriptive representation positively affects communication between voters and their representatives and how they perceive their legislative responsiveness, as the voters' political views are presumably shaped by their race and ethnicity. Therefore, communication between members of Congress and constituents with the same background will be more effective as they know their audience and can adjust their message to make sure the voters will respond to it. As mentioned in the previous chapter, constituents that are descriptively represented tend to be able to recognize the name of their representative, like their representative, and are more likely to vote for them, but this is not always the case for the Latinx community. Similar to constituents of other races and ethnicities, Latinxs are more likely to remember the party and race of their representative if they are of the same ethnicity, but when looking at the connection between descriptive representation and contact, evaluation of service, and legislative responsiveness, the results are not as strong as for other groups. Overall, Latinx descriptive representation in Congress does not enhance how they relate to their legislators, but when it does, the effects are generally larger than for others (Bowen & Clark, 2014).

Although descriptive representation does not have a large positive influence on the political relationship between a constituent and their legislator, it has been proven to build trust between them, which could lead to enhanced feelings of inclusion in the Latinx community. The bond between the two is also often enhanced if there is a candidate with a Spanish last name on a ballot, as this provides a positive message for Latinx constituents (Sanchez & Morin, 2011). Furthermore, Latinxs often become more comfortable with their legislators if they are able to speak the same language as them, in this case mainly Spanish (Casellas & Wallace, 2015). To further emphasize and strengthen the connection with their constituents, Latinx legislators regularly use Spanish-language and Latinx-targeted advertising in campaigns (Sanchez & Morin, 2011). As mentioned before, the Latinx electorate is a heterogeneous group, as it consists of individuals from different origins. While they would generally prefer any Latinx legislator over a legislator from a different race or ethnicity, there might be differences as to what extent they value a legislator based on their origin. Mexican Americans, for example, might value Mexican legislators over Puerto Rican legislators, as they believe they represent their interests better. However, many of them recognize that Latinx representation in Congress is scarce and that it is important to support the growth of their group's representation overall (Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

## 2.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections

As mentioned before, descriptive representation is an important aspect of politics for the Latinx community. The effects described before exclusively apply to representation in Congress, while it also matters on other levels. To be able to understand the full impact of descriptive representation for the Latinx community, I will now analyze the influence of this representation on voter participation in local and presidential elections as well.

Research on the effects of descriptive representation on a congressional level has led to several conclusions on the matter. Descriptive representation for Latinxs has increased through the drawing of majority-minority districts, which has led to an increase in voter turnout in these areas. The reason for this is that Latinx representation is empowering for the community, to which they respond by becoming more engaged in American politics (Barreto et al., 2004). It also becomes easier for Latinxs to gather information about the candidates and the election in general (Rocha et al., 2010). Descriptive representation evokes feelings of shared group consciousness and trust among the community as well (Barreto, 2007). As a result, Latinxs will feel less alienated from American politics and become more likely to participate in elections (Pantoja & Segura, 2003).

Although less research has been done regarding the effect of descriptive representation in local elections, the studies that have been conducted generally found a positive connection. The increase of descriptive representation often leads to the ratification of policies that favor minorities in local governments, such as city councils and school boards (Rocha et al., 2010). There is more evidence for the positive effect of descriptive representation in state legislatures. At the state level, the Latinx community is better represented than in Congress, as the number of Latinx legislators in state legislatures mostly reflects the number of Latinxs in the population of the state. This is the case because many states with a large Latinx population have established term limits for their legislators, which eliminates the incumbency advantage and opens up more seats for new representatives. Another explanation for the high amount of Latinx legislators in the states is that many of these politicians started out in local communities where they had a chance to get to know their constituents and mobilize their supporters (Casellas, 2009).

It is difficult to determine what influence descriptive representation of Latinxs has on presidential elections, as the general election in the United States has never had a Latinx candidate. However, there have been several candidates with Latin roots that took a stab at running for president but did not make it as far as the general election. One of those

candidates was Jeb Bush. He was elected governor of Florida in 1998, where he won a large part of the Latinx vote, and launched a presidential campaign for the 2016 election (Gillin, 2015). Nevertheless, he did not make it to the general election as he ended his campaign in February 2016 due to low numbers in primaries in several states (Cassidy, 2016).

Before he officially launched his presidential campaign, Jeb Bush was popular among the Latinx electorate. Although he was not actually from Latin descent, it did appear as if he was. He married a Mexican woman, studied Latin American affairs, lived in Venezuela for several years, and speaks fluent Spanish. In addition, he favored many policies that were favorable for the Latinx community. Through focusing on the fact that he had embraced the Latin culture he hoped the Latinx community would see him as their candidate (Killingsworth, 2015). This approach did not work in his case, mainly because only few Latinxs participated in the Republican primaries in other states than Florida, where Bush was popular among the Latinx electorate (Bacon, 2015). Jeb Bush's case shows how different support from the Latinx community for a candidate could be in a presidential election than in an election on a different level. Bush earned a large part of the Latinx vote in Florida because the state has a large conservative Cuban population that tends to vote Republican. During national primaries, the group of Latinxs that needs to be reached is much more diverse and has various ideologies, which makes it difficult to approach them (Killingsworth, 2015).

## Chapter 3: Comparing the influence of descriptive representation on the African American and the Latinx community

### 3.1 Self-presentation of African American and Latinx legislators

The first two chapters have described the importance of descriptive representation for African Americans and Latinxs, how African American and Latinx legislators present themselves, how the increase of descriptive representation in Congress affects the relationship between legislators and their constituents, and most importantly, how it affects political participation within the African American and Latinx community. In this chapter, I will compare the results described in the previous chapters to be able to draw a conclusion on to what extent the effect of descriptive representation differs for the African American and Latinx community.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, self-presentation of legislators is an important part of politics as this will enable their constituents to identify with them (Louw, 2015). Nowadays, representatives mainly present themselves and their message on their own websites, where they can depict which issues are relevant to their voters (Gershon, 2008). An important consideration for minority legislators is if they will emphasize their gender, racial, and ethnic background for their voters to identify with. The decision on whether or not legislators focus on these elements depends on what their gender and racial or ethnic background is (Brown & Gershon, 2016). Research has proven that, in most cases, minority legislators emphasize race and race-related issues more than their white counterparts, particularly in legislation, speeches, and communication with their constituents. In the African American community, civil rights played an important part in their history and it is still essential today as full equality has not been obtained yet. Because African American representation in Congress is smaller than that of the white population, there is currently less attention for civil rights affairs than for issues that affect the white population. For these reasons, African American legislators tend to focus on these issues in their self-presentation (Gershon, 2008). Latinx representatives focus on racial issues such as affirmative action, civil rights, and legislation as well (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

Although both groups tend to focus on the same kind of issues, there are differences among representatives of the same race or ethnicity in how they present themselves. Both African American women and Latinas are "doubly disadvantaged", as they are female and have a non-white background. Although female African American representatives emphasize

racial issues as much as their male counterparts, they do focus more on their gender than male legislators. This is the case because they are often stereotyped as tough and non-feminine, to which they react by emphasizing their feminine side, gender identity, and issues related to gender. Latinas especially highlight civil rights issues that are particularly relevant for them. Generally, Latina legislators emphasize issues such as connectedness, collectivity, and community more than Latinx representatives. Although African American and Latina representatives tend to accentuate different issues, they all try to focus on both their gender and heritage, from which they gain a multiple identity advantage. As a result, they will reach a larger community and more people will become able to identify with them (Brown & Gershon, 2016).

African American and Latinx members of Congress pay more attention to gender, race, and ethnicity related issues than white legislators. However, both groups are still highly underrepresented in Congress and their concerns about these issues are rarely heard. For this reason, they try to encompass these race and ethnicity related issues in their discussion of general issues, as these are often on top of the political agenda and therefore have received more attention from both within and outside Congress. By comparison, roughly fifty percent of Latinx legislators relate general affairs to ethnicity related issues, whereas only ten percent of white representatives would do as such (Gershon, 2008).

### 3.2 The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of the African American and Latinx community

In the past, minorities have been extremely underrepresented in politics, and for both African Americans and the Latinx community this is still the case. The establishment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the addition of several amendments in 1982 improved their situation slightly, as they earned the right to vote. Additionally, it became possible to draw majority-minority districts to assure minority representation in governmental institutions (Barreto et al., 2010). These developments led to greater representation in politics and often had a positive influence on the political participation of both minority groups as well. Although the general result of increasing descriptive representation is similar for African Americans and the Latinx community, there are several aspects where they differ.

Research has proven that both African American and Latinx constituents prefer being represented by a legislator who shares their heritage and experiences, as representatives who share their heritage with their constituents tend to be more loyal and attached to the interests

they represent. Because these legislators share the constituents' experiences as well, the issues they deem important are similar to those valued by their constituent (Mansbridge, 1999). For African Americans, some of these shared experiences over which they bond with their legislators include racism, economic hardships, and past legal difficulties regarding participation in elections (Gay, 2001). For the Latinx community, these factors are their Latin American heritage, the fact that they most likely had similar experiences as immigrants, the Spanish language, and the Spanish colonial influence (Barreto, 2008). Although both minority groups prefer having representatives of their own heritage, increasing descriptive representation does not always lead to higher levels of participation in the communities. Having descriptive representation increases empowerment among the constituents, but results on its influence on voter turnout are mixed. It has been proven that the rising prominence of African American legislators in Congress affects the voter turnout of white voters, as this tends to decrease. However, this does not always go hand in hand with mobilization of the African American electorate (Gay, 2001). The effect on the Latinx community is slightly different. Descriptive representation positively affects the electorate as it generally increases interest in politics and it becomes easier to gather information about elections and the candidate. Nevertheless, this is mainly the case in majority-minority districts where the majority of the citizens is Latinx, as it is difficult to elect minority candidates in districts that have a vast white majority, which leads to discouragement among Latinx voters (Rocha et al., 2010).

Although the effect of descriptive representation is different for both groups, the reason behind the fact that increasing the amount of African American and Latinx legislators in Congress is not always as effective as often is believed is frankly the same. Both the African American and the Latinx community are fairly heterogeneous and have various subgroups, which explains for the most part why the rise of descriptive representation has varying effects on these groups. In the African American community, the main difference is between liberal and conservative voters. It is generally the case that white legislators represent rather conservative interests compared to minority legislators, which is why it are mainly liberal African Americans that feel alienated from politics without having descriptive representation. As a result, when representation increases, participation mostly increases among liberal voters, whereas conservatives tend to become less likely to vote (Griffin & Keane, 2006). The main distinction within the Latinx community is established by socio-economic status of the constituents. Because the community includes people from different Latin American countries, there are large differences in status, which is also often linked to

race, as explained in chapter two (Stokes-Brown, 2006). Latinxs base their vote on whether or not a legislator is Latinx, but it becomes more complicated as the country of heritage plays a role as well. For example, Mexican Americans would prefer a Mexican American legislator over someone with Cuban heritage as they would better represent their values (Casellas & Wallace, 2015). In short, descriptive representation affects voter participation of both communities in various ways. Although the groups are fairly different from each other, the underlying reason why representation has the impact that it does, is the same for both of them.

### 3.3 Importance of descriptive representation in the decision-making process

To be able to draw a conclusion on the influence of increasing descriptive representation on minority groups, it is important to research whether or not constituents pay attention to the race and ethnicity of a candidate in the first place, and what other factors are deemed important in the decision-making process. If these results from the African American and the Latinx community are compared, it will become clear if both groups value the same characteristics, and if race really is as important of an indicator as is often believed.

During the decision-making process of an election, voters consider various factors while determining which candidate to vote for. Many elements that African American deem important are fairly the same as those considered relevant by the Latinx electorate. These factors include party, ideology, previous leadership positions, competence, and experience (Tate, 2001; Manzano & Sanchez, 2010). Although these factors are important in the decision-making process, race and ethnicity are important as well. As mentioned before, both African Americans and Latinxs would rather vote for a candidate from their own community than for someone with a different background, but this does not have to be the deciding factor (Stokes-Brown, 2006; Griffin & Keane, 2006).

In addition to the overlapping factors that both African American and Latinx voters focus on, there are some other characteristics regarding the decision-making process that are specific to each group. Besides the aforementioned factors, African American constituents value elements such as seniority, a candidate's campaign activity and expenditures, and their margin of victory in previous elections. Constituents mainly value these elements as they function as indicators of a legislator's experience, popularity, and effectiveness (Tate, 2001). Latinx constituents, on the other hand, tend to focus more on candidates' personal traits than their political experience, as this information is easily accessible. Despite the fact that these

factors play a role in the process, there are also several other factors that stimulate voters to support candidates from their own community. Latinx constituents are more likely to vote for Latinx candidates if they come across as strong and competitive, and are qualified to become a legislator in Congress. In this case, ethnicity is not the deciding factor but it does have an indirect influence. Support for Latinx candidates is even stronger among Latinxs who feel particularly connected to their ethnic traits, are fluent in Spanish, and deem ethnicity more important than other qualifications. These constituents would most likely vote for a Latinx candidate, even if they are less qualified than their opponent. What is specific to the Latinx community is that they consider various factors important in the decision-making process but if all these factors are equal, ethnicity will become the deciding factor (Manzano & Sanchez, 2010). Another element that is specific to Latinxs is that not all of them see their Latinx identity as most prominent, as the Latinx community includes individuals from different backgrounds. As mentioned in chapter two, black Latinxs often identify more with the African American community. A reason for this is that they often have a different socio-economic status than most of the Latinx community and cannot relate to the immigrant experience that the majority of Latinxs has. Because this part of the Latinx community relates more to the African American community, they are less likely to vote for a Latinx candidate in an election (Stokes-Brown, 2006).

Although most African American and Latinx voters believe that having representation in Congress is important, it is not the only factor on which they base their decision. For this reason, it is also difficult to determine whether or not candidates are chosen specifically because of their race or if there were more factors that influenced a voter's decision. However, for both African American and Latinx constituents it has been proven that generally, they would rather vote for a candidate from their own community than for someone from the outside. Their decision could be changed, however, when they start looking at the other factors, which are usually similar for both groups, but not at all times.

### 3.4 The effect of representation on the constituent-legislator relationship

Increasing political representation of minorities has various effects on the communities these legislators represent. Besides the fact that it often increases political participation among minority communities, the relationship between constituents and legislators of the same race or ethnicity are often different from those where the representative and constituent do not have the same background. The general effects of having descriptive representation on this

relationship are similar for African Americans and Latinxs, but because the Latinx community consists of people with different backgrounds from various countries, the relationship between constituent and representative for that group is not always improved when representation grows.

One way in which descriptive representation affects both African American and Latinx voters is that representatives will be more relatable to their constituents and that their opinion on them will most likely become more positive (Tate, 2001). This is the case as minority legislators are likely to have similar concerns as their minority constituents, and legislative responsiveness, to what extent policy outcomes are responsive to voters' preferences, is often higher when constituents are represented by a legislator with the same heritage. An increase in representation also enhances the effectiveness of communication between legislators and their constituents for both African Americans and Latinxs because representatives will know their audience and are therefore able to adjust their message in a way most voters will respond to it. Furthermore, both groups have been proven to positively respond to descriptive representation as constituents have a higher chance of recognizing and knowing the legislator's name and party (Bowen & Clark, 2014). Lastly, increasing representation causes voters to have more trust in their legislators, mainly because of their shared history which has resulted in a sense of linked fate or group consciousness among both the African American and Latinx community (Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

As mentioned before, research has suggested that groups that are sufficiently represented in Congress are more likely to know the name of their legislator and are more likely to vote for them. This is often the case for African Americans, but the situation is different for the Latinx community. They are, like African Americans, more likely to remember the party and name of a representative, but when looking at factors such as effectiveness of contact, evaluation of service, and legislative responsiveness, the results are not as strong as for African Americans (Bowen & Clark, 2014). The bond between Latinx constituents and their legislators is further enhanced when the legislators are able to speak Spanish and have a Spanish last name, which can be seen on the ballot and radiates a positive message to the Latinx community (Casellas & Wallace, 2015). This is also the reason that many Latinx legislators use the Spanish language in their campaign advertisements as often as possible (Sanchez & Morin, 2011). However, the results depend on how much a constituent values the origin of a legislator, as most Mexican Americans prefer being represented by a Mexican American legislator, rather than someone with a different country

of origin. This issue is not present in the African American community (Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

Previous research has proven that African American voters have higher expectations from representatives if they are African American rather than white. They are also more likely to accept information spread by legislators from their own community. There is limited information available regarding this aspect for the Latinx community, but research has proven that compared to the white electorate, the relationship between African American constituents and legislators is more likely to change as a result of increasing representation. This is mostly the case because white interests are continuously represented, whereas this is not the case for minorities (Bowen & Clark, 2014). Lastly, an important reason for African American voters to support black representatives is the fact that they are known for going the extra mile by wanting to represent not only the people within a single district, but also the rest of the African American community in other districts (Casellas & Wallace, 2015). Overall, the main difference between the African American and the Latinx community regarding the relationship between constituent and legislator is the fact that the situation for Latinxs is slightly more complicated as a result of them having various origins. The general effects of descriptive representation on this relationship are fairly similar for both communities.

### 3.5 Representation in local, congressional, and presidential elections

As described in the previous chapters, descriptive representation matters on several levels of American politics. At the congressional level, the differences between the influence of representation on African Americans and Latinxs are limited. At the presidential and local level, the effects are slightly different, even as the contrast between the two minority groups. As in chapter one and two is described, minorities that are well represented in Congress are often more likely to be active voters as it empowers them and it builds trust between the constituent and the candidate (Barreto, 2008; Gay, 2001). However, as both the African American and the Latinx community are heterogeneous groups, this increase of descriptive representation does not have the same effect on everyone within those communities (Griffin & Keane, 2006; Casellas & Wallace, 2015).

The situation at the local level is fairly different, although still similar for both African Americans and Latinxs. Legislators in local governments generally have a larger presence in their community as their target group is smaller than at the congressional and state level. Therefore, they are able to connect with their constituents, which often creates a

bond and motivates the electorate to vote. An increase in descriptive representation at this level makes it easier to ratify policies in favor of minorities as well. (Whitby, 2007; Rocha et al., 2010).

The largest differences between the African American and the Latinx community are visible in elections at the state and presidential level. The Latinx community is well represented at the state level, as the number of legislators in state legislatures mostly reflects the number of Latinxs in the total population of the state, which is less the case for African Americans in state legislatures (Casellas, 2009). It is difficult to compare the effects of descriptive representation between the two minority groups in presidential elections, as there has never been a Latinx candidate in the general election. In the case of African Americans in the 2008 election, a large part of the votes for Barack Obama came from the African American community. Because there was a black candidate, African American voters felt more engaged with the election as they were one of the main target groups of the Obama campaign. They received more information about the candidates and the voting process, which increased the likelihood of them becoming active voters. This particularly had an effect on constituents who were disengaged with politics before the election (Clark, 2014). As mentioned before, it is complicated to determine what the effect of descriptive representation on the Latinx community is in presidential elections. Jeb Bush, a white governor from Florida who appeared as Latino, started a presidential campaign but did not get as far as the general election (Gillin, 2015). It is therefore impossible to compare the differences in voter turnout for a non-Latinx and a Latinx candidate in a presidential election. The reason that Bush ended his campaign early is because of low numbers in several primaries and difficulty to appeal to a diverse national Latinx electorate (Killingsworth, 2015). The fact that the Latinx electorate is diverse and difficult to persuade could be the reason there has not been a Latinx candidate in the general election to this day. Although the African American community is a heterogeneous group as well, this seems to have less of an effect on presidential elections than the diversity of the Latinx community.

## Conclusion

Generally, all minority legislators emphasize their racial or ethnic background more than white legislators. For both the African American and Latinx community, this means putting a strong focus on civil rights and racial issues. Women from both groups tend to include gender issues as well to reach a larger audience. The effect of descriptive representation on political participation of minorities is mostly positive in majority-minority districts, especially for the Latinx community. Both African Americans and Latinxs prefer being represented by a legislator from their own community as they share the same experiences, which often increases empowerment among constituents in the communities. However, descriptive representation does not have the same effect on all constituents within the groups, as these contain large differences. In the African American community there is a contrast between liberals and conservatives, and only the former tend to be affected by descriptive representation. Within the Latinx community, the extent of the effect is determined by the voters' socio-economic status and origin, as they also base their decision on a candidate's country of heritage. In the decision-making process, African American and Latinx voters mainly base their decision on a candidate's party, ideology, and experience. African Americans mostly pay attention to political knowledge, while Latinx voters tend to focus more on personal traits. Ethnicity is rarely a deciding factor, but support generally does increase when a candidate is connected to their ethnic traits. However, not all Latinxs see their Latinx identity as their most essential trait as a result of the diversity within the group.

The relationship between African American and Latinx legislators and their voters is mostly influenced by descriptive representation as these legislators will become easier to relate to, have more effective communication, and know the values of the community well. African Americans tend to support black legislators as they tend to go the extra mile for constituents both within and outside of their districts. The connection between Latinx voters and their constituents grows when the representative speaks Spanish or has a Spanish last name and depends on the legislator's country of origin. The effects of descriptive representation at the local level are similar for African Americans and Latinxs. At the state level, Latinxs are well represented in relation to the total population in a state, which is not the case for African Americans. As there has never been a Latinx candidate in a general election, most likely because the diverse Latinx electorate is difficult to reach, the situation in presidential elections is difficult to compare. Overall, the effect of descriptive representation is in many cases similar for the African American and the Latinx community. It has become

clear that the most feasible reason for the differences that do appear is the diversity of both minority groups, as the African American community contains voters with different ideologies and the Latinx community is divided by socio-economic status and heritage. Although descriptive representation often leads to larger engagement among the minority groups that have been discussed in this thesis, limited research has been done on the effectiveness of descriptive representation regarding policies within Congress. As the amount of African American and Latinx legislators could to continue to grow in the upcoming years, it will be interesting to see what will happen. Areas of attention are the political participation of the constituencies as well as the number of policies that will be authorized in favor of descriptively represented minority groups. There is a chance the situation will change if a new president is elected in 2020, but for now, African American and Latinx representation in the U.S. Congress still has a long way to go before those groups receive the representation they deserve.

## References

- Alter, C. (2019, March 21). "Change is Closer Than We Think." Inside Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Unlikely Rise. *TIME*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/longform/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-profile/>
- Bacon, P. (2015, June 26). From Republicans, Skepticism About Bush's Ability To Win Latinos. *NBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/can-jeb-win-latinos-do-republicans-care-n382811>
- Barreto, M. (2007). The Role of Latino Candidates in Mobilizing Latino Voters: Revisiting Latino Vote Choice. In R. Espino, D. Leal, & K. Meier (Eds.), *Latino Politics: Identity, Mobilization, and Representation* (pp. 63-89). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press. Retrieved from [http://www.mattbarreto.com/papers/espino\\_volume.pdf](http://www.mattbarreto.com/papers/espino_volume.pdf)
- Barreto, M., Segura, G., & Woods, N. (2004). The Mobilizing Effect of Majority-Minority Districts on Latino Turnout. *The American Political Science Review*, 98(1), 65–75. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4145297>
- Bialik, K. (2019, February 8). For the Fifth Time in a Row, the New Congress is the Most Racially and Ethnically Diverse Ever. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/08/for-the-fifth-time-in-a-row-the-new-congress-is-the-most-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-ever/>
- Bowen, D., & Clark, C. (2014). Revisiting Descriptive Representation in Congress: Assessing the Effect of Race on the Constituent-Legislator Relationship. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(3), 695–707. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914531658>
- Brown, N., & Gershon, S. (2016). Intersectional Presentations: An Exploratory Study of Minority Congresswomen's Websites' Biographies. *Du Bois Review*, 13(1), 85–108. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X15000181>

- Casellas, J. (2009). The Institutional and Demographic Determinants of Latino Representation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34(3), 399–426.  
<https://doi.org/10.3162/036298009788897781>
- Casellas, J., & Wallace, S. (2015). The Role of Race, Ethnicity, and Party on Attitudes Toward Descriptive Representation. *American Politics Research*, 43(1), 144–169.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X14535239>
- Cassidy, J. (2016, February 22). Who Killed Jeb Bush’s Campaign? Jeb Did. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/who-killed-jeb-bushs-campaign-jeb-did>
- Clark, C. (2014). Collective Descriptive Representation and Black Voter Mobilization in 2008. *Political Behavior*, 36(2), 315–333. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/43653192>
- Congressional Research Service. (2019). *Membership of the 116th Congress: A Profile*. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45583.pdf>
- Gamboa, S. (2018, November 15). Latinos Show Record Gains in Congress, Though Numbers Are Still Low. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latinos-show-record-gains-congress-though-numbers-are-still-low-n936781>
- Gay, C. (2001). The Effect of Black Congressional Representation on Political Participation. *American Political Science Review*, 95(3), 589–602. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3118235>
- Gershon, S. (2008). Communicating Female and Minority Interests Online: A Study of Web Site Issue Discussion among Female, Latino, and African American Members of Congress. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(2), 120–140.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208315741>

- Gillin, J. (2015, July 31). Jeb Bush Says He Won 60% of the Hispanic Vote in 2002 Election. Retrieved from <https://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2015/jul/31/jeb-bush/jeb-bush-says-he-won-60-hispanic-vote-2002-electio/>
- Griffin, J., & Keane, M. (2006). Descriptive Representation and the Composition of African American Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(4), 998–1012. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4122929>
- Killingsworth, S. (2015, April 6). How Hispanic Is Jeb Bush? *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-hispanic-is-jeb-bush>
- Lijphart, A. (1997). Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996. *American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952255>
- Louw, P. E. (2005). *The Media and Political Process*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.
- Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes.” *The Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2647821>
- Manzano, S., & Sanchez, G. (2010). Take One for the Team? Limits of Shared Ethnicity and Candidate Preferences. *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(3), 568–580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909333130>
- Merolla, J. L., Sellers, A. H., & Fowler, D. J. (2013). Descriptive Representation, Political Efficacy, and African Americans in the 2008 Presidential Election. *Political Psychology*, 34(6), 863–875. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00934.x>
- Pantoja, A. D., & Segura, G. M. (2003). Does Ethnicity Matter? Descriptive Representation in Legislatures and Political Alienation Among Latinos\*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 84(2), 441–460. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6237.8402014>

- Rocha, R., Tolbert, C., Bowen, D., & Clark, C. (2010). Race and Turnout: Does Descriptive Representation in State Legislatures Increase Minority Voting? *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(4), 890–907. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25749258>
- Sanchez, G. R., & Morin, J. L. (2011). The Effect of Descriptive Representation on Latinos' Views of Government and of Themselves\*. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92(2), 483–508. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2011.00779.x>
- Stokes-Brown, A. K. (2006). Racial Identity and Latino Vote Choice. *American Politics Research*, 34(5), 627–652. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X06289156>
- Tate, K. (2001). The Political Representation of Blacks in Congress: Does Race Matter? *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 26(4), 623–638. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/440272>
- Wallace, S. J. (2014). Representing Latinos: Examining Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(4), 917–929. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914541795>
- Washington, E. (2006). How Black Candidates Affect Voter Turnout. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 121(3), 973–998. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25098814>
- Whitby, K. J. (2007). The Effect of Black Descriptive Representation on Black Electoral Turnout in the 2004 Elections. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88(4), 1010–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2007.00515.x>
- Zweigenhaft, R. (2018, November 8). The 116th Congress Has More Women and People of Color Than Ever – But There's Still Room to Improve. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/the-116th-congress-has-more-women-and-people-of-color-than-ever-but-theres-still-room-to-improve-105930>